

In The Claims:**Claims 1-14 (canceled)**

15. (original) A structure of metal interconnects, comprising:
a first dielectric layer, having a first opening therein;
a first metal layer, formed in the first opening; and
a first protective layer, formed on the surface of the first metal layer not covered by the first dielectric layer.

16. (original) The structure according to claim 15, wherein the first metal layer is comprised of copper.

17. (original) The structure according to claim 15, further comprising a first stop layer on the surface of the first dielectric layer with the first opening formed in the first dielectric layer and the first stop layer.

18. (original) The structure according to claim 15, further comprising:
a second dielectric layer, formed over the first dielectric layer, wherein the second dielectric layer has a second opening therein cutting through the first protective layer to expose the first metal layer;
a second metal layer, being filled into the second opening; and
a second protective layer, formed on the surface of the second metal layer not covered by the second dielectric layer.

19. (original) The structure according to claim 18, wherein the second metal layer is comprised of copper.

20. (original) The structure according to claim 18, further comprising a second stop layer on the surface of the second dielectric layer, wherein the second opening is formed in the second dielectric layer and the second stop layer.

No new matter has been added to the application by the amendments made to the claims.

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